J. S. Bach

Johannes Passion

(St. John Passion, Part I) BWV 245

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PREFACE



mong the many famous works from the Middle Ages to the present in which the fine arts and the spoken word have repeatedly celebrated the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, the Passion Music of J. S. Bach is the foremost monument, powerful and deeply moving, of the religious spirit.

Johann Sebastian Bach (born March 21, 1685 in Eisenach, died July 28, 1750 in Leipzig) wrote five Passions. Three have come down to our times, of which the short Passion according to the Gospel of St. Luke is of rather doubtful authenticity. They belong to the so-called oratoric Passions, successors to the choral and motet Passions from which they are distinguished by a greater variety of musical forms and material, and even more by the numerous insertions in the Biblical story of freely invented descriptions given to unhistorical, allegoric characters. This resulted in a gradual change of the Passion during the eighteenth century and especially in the Hamburg school to a sentimental, ornamented theatre piece. Bach strongly fought this secularization by strictly adhering to the pure, unadulterated text of the Bible which is marked clearly in red ink in the autograph of the St. Matthew Passion, and also by having the lyrical inserts dominated by the Lutheran chorale, i.e. a liturgical church element.

In the St. John Passion, this latter process is not as clearly handled as in the St. Matthew Passion. Already the first two arias show that Bach had difficulties in selecting and placing the madrigal text sections. The St. Matthew Passion is also superior in the two-part division of chorus and orchestra, the loftier effect, the marvelously artful, yet popular chorale choruses, the solemnity of the figure of the Saviour and the warm feelings in the report of the Evangelist. It is with good reason that numerous authorities, foremost among them Robert Schumann, give preference to the St. John Passion. They can be found in such accomplishments as the alto aria: "Es ist vollbracht," the tenor aria: "Ach mein Sinn," the dialogue of the "Tochter Zion" (bass solo) with the chorus of the "gläubigen Seelen:" "Eilt, ihr angefochtnen Seelen," especially in the opening chorus: "Herr,

unser Herrscher." These are compositions which are incomparable among the treasures of old and new Good Friday music in their austere rendering of deepest mental suffering and passionately ecstatic devotion.

The Biblical dramatic part of the St. John Passion gains even more importance through the people's choruses, which, from the denial of Peter on, stand out above everything else. Here Bach describes the hostility of the misguided crowd at every step from mockery to frantic rage, and he does so with a realistic touch and severity which are deeply moving and make all reflection about the events unnecessary. The climax in this chain of merciless paintings of the people, connected musically by equal or similar accompanying figures, is the chorus: "Kreuzige, kreuzige" with the furious screams of the basses thundering through the final measures.

Investigations by the Bach biographer Philipp Spitta indicate that Bach had already composed the St. John Passion in Cöthen in anticipation of becoming cantor of St. Thomas. It received its first performance in Leipzig on Good Friday 1723 and was repeated three times, in revised form, during his tenure there. According to assurances by Friedrich Rochlitz, it was well-known to the pupils of St. Thomas up to the end of the 18th century. Afterwards, along with other vocal compositions by Bach it disappeared from the memory of the musical world and only came to light again following the revival of the St. Matthew Passion. Rungenhagen performed it with the Berlin Singakademie in 1833, and the score was printed during the same year by Trautwein in Berlin. However, the performance and the printed score remained little noticed, and the St. John Passion only began to take roots three decades later.

Hermann Kretzschmar

PART I

Nº1 Chor

























Nº2 Recitativ











Nº9 Choral















Nº 12 Recitativ













Nº 14 Recitativ









Nº 15 Choral



Nº 16 Recitativ



















End of Part I

PART II



























Nº 32 Arie

























Nº 36 Chor



































Nº46 Chor





















Nº 50 Chor





Nº 52 Choral



Nº54 Chor

















Nº58 Arie









Nº 60 Arie mit Chor











Nº 61 Recitativ





































